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SUBJECT: MADHYA PRADESH: FIREBRAND BHARTI SIDELINED AS BJP NAMES NEW CHIEF MINISTER

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Summary

1. (SBU) On November 26, the BJP national leadership replaced Madhya Pradesh (MP) Chief Minister Babulal Gaur with state party President Shivraj Singh Chauhan. The action was a blow to former MP chief minister Uma Bharti, a controversial and boisterous politician who had lobbied heavily behind the scenes to oust Gaur in hopes of returning as chief minister (reftel). In a move apparently aimed at pacifying Bharti, the BJP national leadership named her BJP national general secretary. The BJP leadership's decision to sideline Bharti is seen as a victory for the party's second-tier leadership, which both resents and fears Bharti's firebrand political style and her recent reemergence as a political force following her suspension from the party in late 2004. End summary.

BJP Leadership Moves Without Consulting State Parliament

2. (SBU) The BJP took the decision to replace the MP chief minister without prior consultations with the party's faction in the state parliament. Some observers had commented that the central leadership wanted to avoid a direct encounter with the many parliament members loyal to the firebrand Bharti. Nonetheless, we expect most BJP legislators to support the change. Chauhan and his new cabinet will likely be sworn in on November 29 or 30.

3. (SBU) In comments to the media, many members of Bharti's sizable contingent of MP supporters expressed disappointment that their leader fell short of her goal of recapturing the Chief Minister post. However, as of November 28 it did not appear that Bharti's loyalists had either the critical mass or the political will to challenge the central leadership's decision. Bharti herself has not made any public comments since the party leadership announced its decision.

4. (SBU) Gaur succeeded Bharti as chief minister in August 2004. Bharti was forced to resign after the MP police issued a warrant for her arrest. In the mid-1990s Bharati allegedly sponsored a demonstration in support of the national flag that resulted in a violent clash with political opponents and she was charged with incitement to riot. Within a month, the charges were dropped, but the party leadership refused to reinstate her. Many of her supporters believed that Bharati fell victim to a political trick played on her by second-rung MP BJP leaders who felt threatened by her popularity. She began to air her grievances publicly, and in December 2004 even incurred a party suspension for confronting BJP leaders on live television. She was late reinstated and actively campaigned for the BJP in the recent Bihar elections.

Chauhan Will Be Fourth CM Since 2003

5. (SBU) Gaur was the third chief minister in Madhya Pradesh in as many years. He was viewed as a weak and ineffective leader of an administration tainted by numerous corruption charges. There was a strong movement in both MP and at the national level to oust him. Bharti tried to capitalize on this discontent in her own campaign to regain the CM job in Bhopal. In doing so, she encountered the resistance of the second-tier political leadership of the BJP, which resents her abrasive political style and feels threatened by her continued widespread popularity at the grassroots level.

Comment

6. (SBU) Bharti won her battle to oust Gaur but lost the war she had waged to be reinstated as chief minister. This is the latest step by the national BJP leadership to tighten its grip in the Hindu heartland after the NDA's recent strong performance in the Bihar elections. At the same time, however, the party leadership was not interested in furthering the political ambitions of the volatile and incalculable Bharti, who has been mounting a successful political comeback since her party suspension in late 2004. The move to keep her out of power in Bhopal can be seen as a victory for the second-tier leadership of the BJP, which is maneuvering for position ahead of the

planned retirement of party president LK Advani later this year. It is unlikely, however, that the BJP has heard the last of the ambitious Bharti, who will no doubt use her political talents and the grassroots resentment towards the central BJP leadership's decision to launch another attempt at regaining power in Bhopal. As part of its consolidation of power in the Hindi belt, the BJP could well turn to Rajasthan next, where another charismatic female politician, Vasundhara Raje, faces factional opposition. Rumor had it that Raje would be offered the General Secretary slot to entice her back to New Delhi. Once the BJP deals with factionalism in its Hindi belt bastions, it will likely focus on Uttar Pradesh, where national parties like the BJP and Congress have had little success in breaking the stranglehold of regional politicians. End comment.

Biography of New MP Chief Minister Shivraj Chouhan

17. (U) Shivraj Singh Chouhan was born on 5 March 1959 in Jait village of Sehore district of Madhya Pradesh. He received an M.A. in Philosophy from Bhopal University, Madhya Pradesh, and is an agriculturist by profession. Chouhan has been a member of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (R.S.S.) since 1972, and has been active in various roles in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its youth movement since the late 1970s. In 1990 he was elected to the legislative assembly of Madhya Pradesh. In 1991, he was elected to the Lok Sabha, representing the Vidisha Constituency of Madhya Pradesh. He has been reelected to the Lok Shabha four times, the last time in 2004. In 1992 he was named general secretary of the BJP in Madhya Pradesh. From 2000-2003 Chouhan was a National Secretary, and in 2004 he was named National General Secretary for the BJP. In early 2005 he was named BJP party president in Madhya Pradesh. He resigned this post after being designated as new Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh on November 26, 2005. He and his spouse Sadhna Singh Chouhan were married on May 5, 1992, and have two sons.
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